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THE TREMOLINO

THE

TREMOLINO

BY

JOSEPH CONRAD

NEW YORK
PHILIP C. DUSCHNES
1942

Reprinted from
THE MIRROR OF THE SEA
by Joseph Conrad

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To

H. WATSON KENT

Chief instigator of this printing
of his favorite sea tale.

B. R.

HAPPY he who, like Ulysses, has made an adventurous voyage; and there is no such sea for adventurous voyages as the Mediterranean—the inland sea which the ancients looked upon as so vast and so full of wonders. And, indeed, it was terrible and wonderful; for it is we alone who, swayed by the audacity of our minds and the tremors of our hearts, are the sole artisans of all the wonder and romance of the world.

It was for the Mediterranean sailors that fair-haired sirens sang among the black rocks seething in white foam, and mysterious voices spoke in the darkness above the moving wave—voices menacing, seductive, or prophetic, like that voice heard at the beginning of the Christian era by the master of an African vessel in the Gulf of Syrta, whose calm nights are full of strange murmurs and flitting shadows. It called him by name, bidding him go and tell all men that the great god Pan was dead. But the great legend of the Mediterranean, the legend of traditional song and grave history, lives, fascinating and immortal, in our minds.

The dark and fearful sea of the subtle Ulysses' wanderings, agitated by the wrath of Olympian gods, harbouring on its isles the fury of strange monsters and the wiles of strange women; the highway of heroes and sages, of warriors, and pirates, and

saints; the workaday sea of Carthaginian merchants and the pleasure lake of the Roman Cæsars, claims the veneration of every seaman as the historical home of that spirit of open defiance against the great waters of the earth which is the very soul of his calling. Issuing thence to the west and south, as a youth leaves the shelter of his parental house, this spirit found the way to the Indies, discovered the coasts of a new continent, and traversed at last the immensity of the great Pacific, rich in groups of islands remote and mysterious like the constellations of the sky.

The first impulse of navigation took its visible form in that tideless basin freed from hidden shoals and treacherous currents, as if in tender regard for the infancy of the art. The steep shores of the Mediterranean favoured the beginners in one of humanity's most daring enterprises, and the enchanting inland sea of classic adven-

ture has led mankind gently from headland to headland, from bay to bay, from island to island, out into the promise of world-wide oceans beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

* * *

It was written that there, in the nursery of our navigating ancestors, I should learn to walk in the ways of my craft and grow in the love of the sea, blind as young love often is, but absorbing and unselfish as all true love must be. I demanded nothing from it—not even adventure. In this I showed, perhaps, more intuitive wisdom than high self-denial. No adventure ever came to one for the asking. He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great amongst heroes, like that most excellent cavalier Don Quixote de la Mancha. By us ordinary mortals of a mediocre animus that is only too anxious to pass by

wicked giants for so many honest windmills, adventures are entertained like visiting angels. They come upon our complacency unawares. As unbidden guests are apt to do, they often come at inconvenient times. And we are glad to let them go unrecognized, without any acknowledgment of so high a favour. After many years, on looking back from the middle turn of life's way at the events of the past, which, like a friendly crowd, seem to gaze sadly after us hastening towards the Cimmerian shore, we may see here and there, in the grey throng, some figure glowing with a faint radiance, as though it had caught all the light of our already crepuscular sky. And by this glow we may recognize the faces of our true adventures, of the once unbidden guests entertained unawares in our young days.

If the Mediterranean, the venerable (and sometimes atrociously ill-tempered)

nurse of all navigators, was to rock my youth, the providing of the cradle necessary for that operation was entrusted by Fate to the most casual assemblage of irresponsible young men (all, however, older than myself) who, as if drunk with Provençal sunshine, frittered life away in joyous levity on the model of Balzac's *Histoire des Treize* qualified by a dash of romance *de cape et d'épée.*

She who was my cradle in those years had been built on the River of Savona by a famous builder of boats, was rigged in Corsica by another good man, and was described on her papers as a 'tartane' of sixty tons. In reality, she was a true balancelle, with two short masts raking forward and two curved yards, each as long as her hull; a true child of the Latin lake, with a spread of two enormous sails resembling the pointed wings on a sea-bird's slender body, and herself, like a bird indeed,

skimming rather than sailing the seas.

Her name was the *Tremolino*. How is this to be translated? The *Quiverer?* What a name to give the pluckiest little craft that ever dipped her sides in angry foam. I had felt her, it is true, trembling for nights and days together under my feet, but it was with the high-strung tenseness of her faithful courage. In her short, but brilliant, career she has taught me nothing, but she has given me everything. I owe to her the awakened love for the sea that, with the quivering of her swift little body and the humming of the wind under the foot of her lateen sails, stole into my heart with a sort of gentle violence, and brought my imagination under its despotic sway. The *Tremolino!* To this day I cannot utter or even write that name without a strange tightening of the breast and the gasp of mingled delight and dread of one's first passionate experience.

We four formed (to use a term well understood nowadays in every social sphere) a "syndicate" owning the *Tremolino*: an international and astonishing syndicate. And we were all ardent Royalists of the snow-white Legitimist complexion——Heaven only knows why! In all associations of men there is generally one who, by the authority of age and of a more experienced wisdom, imparts a collective character to the whole set. If I mention that the oldest of us was very old, extremely old—nearly thirty years old—and that he used to declare with gallant carelessness, "I live by my sword," I think I have given enough information on the score of our collective wisdom. He was a North Carolinian gentleman, J. M. K. B. were the initials of his name, and he really did live by the sword, as far as I know. He died by it, too, later on, in a Balkanian squabble, in the cause of some Serbs or else Bulgarians, who

were neither Catholics nor gentlemen—at least, not in the exalted but narrow sense he attached to that last word.

Poor J. M. K. B., *Américain, Catholique, et gentilhomme,* as he was disposed to describe himself in moments of lofty expansion! Are there still to be found in Europe gentlemen keen of face and elegantly slight of body, of distinguished aspect, with a fascinating drawing-room manner and with a dark, fatal glance, who live by their swords, I wonder? His family had been ruined in the Civil War, I fancy, and seems for a decade or so to have led a wandering life in the Old World.

As to Henry C——, the next in age and wisdom of our band, he had broken loose from the unyielding rigidity of his family, solidly rooted, if I remember rightly, in a well-to-do London suburb. On their respectable authority he introduced himself meekly to strangers as a "black

sheep." I have never seen a more guileless specimen of an outcast. Never.

However, his people had the grace to send him a little money now and then. Enamoured of the South, of Provence, of its people, its life, its sunshine, and its poetry, narrow-chested, tall and short-sighted, he strode along the streets and the lanes, his long feet projecting far in advance of his body, and his white nose and gingery moustache buried in an open book: for he had the habit of reading as he walked. How he avoided falling into precipices, off the quays, or down staircases is a great mystery. The sides of his overcoat bulged out with pocket editions of various poets. When not engaged in reading Virgil, Homer, or Mistral, in parks, restaurants, streets, and suchlike public places, he indited sonnets (in French) to the eyes, ears, chin, hair, and other visible perfections of a nymph called Thérèse, the daughter,

honesty compels me to state, of a certain Madame Leonore who kept a small café for sailors in one of the narrowest streets of the old town.

No more charming face, clear-cut like an antique gem, and delicate in colouring like the petal of a flower, had ever been set on, alas! a somewhat squat body. He read his verses aloud to her in the very café with the innocence of a little child and the vanity of a poet. We followed him there willingly enough, if only to watch the divine Thérèse laugh, under the vigilant black eyes of Madame Leonore, her mother. She laughed very prettily, not so much at the sonnets, which she could not but esteem, as at poor Henry's French accent, which was unique, resembling the warbling of birds, if birds ever warbled with a stuttering, nasal intonation.

Our third partner was Roger P. de la S——, the most Scandinavian-looking of

Provençal squires, fair, and six feet high, as became a descendant of sea-roving Northmen, authoritative, incisive, wittily scornful, with a comedy in three acts in his pocket, and in his breast a heart blighted by a hopeless passion for his beautiful cousin, married to a wealthy hide and tallow merchant. He used to take us to lunch at their house without ceremony. I admired the good lady's sweet patience. The husband was a conciliatory soul, with a great fund of resignation, which he expended on "Roger's friends." I suspect he was secretly horrified at these invasions. But it was a Carlist salon, and as such we were made welcome. The possibility of raising Catalonia in the interest of the *Rey netto*, who had just then crossed the Pyrenees, was much discussed there.

Don Carlos, no doubt, must have had many queer friends (it is the common lot of all Pretenders), but amongst them none

more extravagantly fantastic than the *Tremolino* Syndicate, which used to meet in a tavern on the quays of the old port. The antique city of Massilia had surely never, since the days of the earliest Phœnicians, known an odder set of shipowners. We met to discuss and settle the plan of operations for each voyage of the *Tremolino*. In these operations a banking-house, too, was concerned—a very respectable banking-house. But I am afraid I shall end by saying too much. Ladies, too, were concerned (I am really afraid I am saying too much)—all sorts of ladies, some old enough to know better than to put their trust in princes, others young and full of illusions.

One of these last was extremely amusing in the imitations, she gave us in confidence, of various highly-placed personages she was perpetually rushing off to Paris to interview in the interests of the cause—*Por el Rey!* For she was a Carlist, and of

Basque blood at that, with something of a lioness in the expression of her courageous face (especially when she let her hair down), and with the volatile little soul of a sparrow dressed in fine Parisian feathers, which had the trick of coming off disconcertingly at unexpected moments.

But her imitations of a Parisian personage, very highly placed indeed, as she represented him standing in the corner of a room with his face to the wall, rubbing the back of his head and moaning helplessly, "Rita, you are the death of me!" were enough to make one (if young and free from cares) split one's sides laughing. She had an uncle still living, a very effective Carlist, too, the priest of a little mountain parish in Guipuzcoa. As the seagoing member of the syndicate (whose plans depended greatly on Doña Rita's information), I used to be charged with humbly affectionate messages for the old

man. These messages I was supposed to deliver to the Arragonese muleteers (who were sure to await at certain times the *Tremolino* in the neighbourhood of the Gulf of Rosas), for faithful transportation inland, together with the various unlawful goods landed secretly from under the *Tremolino's* hatches.

Well, now, I have really let out too much (as I feared I should in the end) as to the usual contents of my sea-cradle. But let it stand. And if anybody remarks cynically that I must have been a promising infant in those days, let that stand, too. I am concerned but for the good name of the *Tremolino*, and I affirm that a ship is ever guiltless of the sins, transgressions, and follies of her men.

It was not *Tremolino's* fault that the syndicate depended so much on the wit and wisdom and the information of Doña Rita. She had taken a little furnished house

on the Prado for the good of the cause—*Por el Rey!* She was always taking little houses for somebody's good, for the sick or the sorry, for broken-down artists, cleaned-out gamblers, temporarily unlucky speculators—*vieux amis*—old friends, as she used to explain apologetically, with a shrug of her fine shoulders.

Whether Don Carlos was one of the "old friends," too, it's hard to say. More unlikely things have been heard of in smoking-rooms. All I know is that one evening, entering incautiously the salon of the little house just after the news of a considerable Carlist success had reached the faithful, I was seized round the neck and waist and whirled recklessly three times round the room, to the crash of upsetting furniture and the humming of a valse tune in a warm contralto voice.

When released from the dizzy embrace, I sat down on the carpet—suddenly, with-

out affectation. In this unpretentious attitude I became aware that J. M. K. B. had followed me into the room, elegant, fatal, correct, and severe in a white tie and large shirt-front. In answer to his politely sinister, prolonged glance of inquiry, I overheard Doña Rita murmuring, with some confusion and annoyance, "*Vous êtes bête, mon cher. Voyons! Ça n'a aucune conséquence.*" Well content in this case to be of no particular consequence, I had already about me the elements of some worldly sense.

Rearranging my collar, which, truth to say, ought to have been a round one above a short jacket, but was not, I observed felicitously that I had come to say goodbye, being ready to go off to sea that very night with the *Tremolino*. Our hostess, slightly panting yet, and just a shade dishevelled, turned tartly upon J. M. K. B., desiring to know when *he* would be ready

to go off by the *Tremolino*, or in any other way, in order to join the royal headquarters. Did he intend, she asked ironically, to wait for the very eve of the entry into Madrid? Thus by a judicious exercise of tact and asperity we re-established the atmospheric equilibrium of the room long before I left them a little before midnight, now tenderly reconciled, to walk down to the harbour and hail the *Tremolino* by the usual soft whistle from the edge of the quay. It was our signal, invariably heard by the ever-watchful Dominic, the *padrone*.

He would raise a lantern silently to light my steps along the narrow, springy plank of our primitive gangway. "And so we are going off," he would murmur directly my foot touched the deck. I was the harbinger of sudden departures, but there was nothing in the world sudden enough to take Dominic unawares. His thick black moustaches, curled every morn-

ing with hot tongs by the barber at the corner of the quay, seemed to hide a perpetual smile. But nobody, I believe, had ever seen the true shape of his lips. From the slow, imperturbable gravity of that broad-chested man you would think he had never smiled in his life. In his eyes lurked a look of perfectly remorseless irony, as though he had been provided with an extremely experienced soul; and the slightest distension of his nostrils would give to his bronzed face a look of extraordinary boldness. This was the only play of feature of which he seemed capable, being a Southerner of a concentrated, deliberate type. His ebony hair curled slightly on the temples. He may have been forty years old, and he was a great voyager on the inland sea.

Astute and ruthless, he could have rivalled in resource the unfortunate son of Laertes and Anticlea. If he did not pit his

craft and audacity against the very gods, it is only because the Olympian gods are dead. Certainly no woman could frighten him. A one-eyed giant would not have had the ghost of a chance against Dominic Cervoni, of Corsica, not Ithaca; and no king, son of kings, but of very respectable family—authentic Caporali, he affirmed. But that is as it may be. The Caporali families date back to the twelfth century.

For want of more exalted adversaries Dominic turned his audacity fertile in impious stratagems against the powers of the earth, as represented by the institution of Custom-houses and every mortal belonging thereto—scribes, officers, and guardacostas afloat and ashore. He was the very man for us, this modern and unlawful wanderer with his own legend of loves, dangers, and bloodshed. He told us bits of it sometimes in measured, ironic tones. He spoke Catalonian, the Italian of

Corsica and the French of Provence with the same easy naturalness. Dressed in shore-togs, a white starched shirt, black jacket, and round hat, as I took him once to see Doña Rita, he was extremely presentable. He could make himself interesting by a tactful and rugged reserve set off by a grim, almost imperceptible, playfulness of tone and manner.

He had all the physical assurance of strong-hearted men. After half an hour's interview in the dining-room, during which they got in touch with each other in an amazing way, Rita told us in her best *grande dame* manner: "*Mais il est parfait, cet homme.*" He was perfect. On board the *Tremolino*, wrapped up in a black *caban*, the picturesque cloak of Mediterranean seamen, with those massive moustaches and his remorseless eyes set off by the shadow of the deep hood, he looked piratical and monkish and darkly initiated

into the most awful mysteries of the sea.

Anyway, he was perfect, as Doña Rita had declared. The only thing unsatisfactory (and even inexplicable) about our Dominic was his nephew, Cesar. It was startling to see a desolate expression of shame veil the remorseless audacity in the eyes of that man superior to all scruples and terrors.

"I would never have dared to bring him on board your balancelle," he once apologized to me. "But what am I to do? His mother is dead, and my brother has gone into the bush."

In this way I learned that our Dominic had a brother. As to "going into the bush," this only means that a man has done his duty successfully in the pursuit of a hereditary vendetta. The feud which had existed for ages between the families of Cervoni and Brunaschi was so old that it seemed to have smouldered out at last.

One evening Pietro Brunaschi, after a laborious day amongst his olive-trees, sat on a chair against the wall of his house with a bowl of broth on his knees and a piece of bread in his hand. Dominic's brother, going home with a gun on his shoulder, found a sudden offence in this picture of content and rest so obviously calculated to awaken the feelings of hatred and revenge. He and Pietro had never had any personal quarrel; but, as Dominic explained, "all our dead cried out to him." He shouted from behind a wall of stones, "O Pietro! Behold what is coming!" And as the other looked up innocently he took aim at the forehead and squared the old vendetta account so neatly that, according to Dominic, the dead man continued to sit with the bowl of broth on his knees and the piece of bread in his hand.

This is why—because in Corsica your dead will not leave you alone—Dominic's

brother had to go into the *maquis*, into the bush on the wild mountain-side, to dodge the gendarmes for the insignificant remainder of his life, and Dominic had charge of his nephew with a mission to make a man of him.

No more unpromising undertaking could be imagined. The very material for the task seemed wanting. The Cervonis, if not handsome men, were good sturdy flesh and blood. But this extraordinarily lean and livid youth seemed to have no more blood in him than a snail.

"Some cursed witch must have stolen my brother's child from the cradle and put that spawn of a starved devil in its place," Dominic would say to me. "Look at him! Just look at him!"

To look at Cesar was not pleasant. His parchment skin, showing dead white on his cranium through the thin wisps of dirty brown hair, seemed to be glued

directly and tightly upon his big bones. Without being in any way deformed, he was the nearest approach which I have ever seen or could imagine to what is commonly understood by the word "monster." That the source of the effect produced was really moral I have no doubt. An utterly, hopelessly depraved nature was expressed in physical terms, that taken each separately had nothing positively startling. You imagined him clammily cold to the touch, like a snake. The slightest reproof, the most mild and justifiable remonstrance, would be met by a resentful glare and an evil shrinking of his thin dry upper lip, a snarl of hate to which he generally added the agreeable sound of grinding teeth.

It was for this venomous performance rather than for his lies, impudence, and laziness that his uncle used to knock him down. It must not be imagined that it was

anything in the nature of a brutal assault. Dominic's brawny arm would be seen describing deliberately an ample horizontal gesture, a dignified sweep, and Cesar would go over suddenly like a ninepin—which was funny to see. But, once down, he would writhe on the deck, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage—which was pretty horrible to behold. And it also happened more than once that he would disappear completely—which was startling to observe. This is the exact truth. Before some of these majestic cuffs Cesar would go down and vanish. He would vanish heels overhead into open hatchways, into scuttles, behind up-ended casks, according to the place where he happened to come into contact with his uncle's mighty arm.

Once—it was in the old harbour, just before the *Tremolino's* last voyage—he vanished thus overboard to my infinite consternation. Dominic and I had been

talking business together aft, and Cesar had sneaked up behind us to listen, for, amongst his other perfections, he was a consummate eavesdropper and spy. At the sound of the heavy plop alongside horror held me rooted to the spot; but Dominic stepped quietly to the rail and leaned over, waiting for his nephew's miserable head to bob up for the first time.

"Ohé, Cesar!" he yelled contemptuously to the spluttering wretch. "Catch hold of that mooring hawser—*charogne!*" He approached me to resume the interrupted conversation. "What about Cesar?" I asked anxiously.

"*Canallia!* Let him hang there," was his answer. And he went on talking over the business in hand calmly, while I tried vainly to dismiss from my mind the picture of Cesar steeped to the chin in the water of the old harbour, a decoction of centuries of marine refuse. I tried to dis-

miss it, because the mere notion of that liquid made me feel very sick. Presently Dominic, hailing an idle boatman, directed him to go and fish his nephew out; and by-and-by Cesar appeared walking on board from the quay, shivering, streaming with filthy water, with bits of rotten straws in his hair and a piece of dirty orange-peel stranded on his shoulder. His teeth chattered; his yellow eyes squinted balefully at us as he passed forward. I thought it my duty to remonstrate.

"Why are you always knocking him about, Dominic?" I asked. Indeed, I felt convinced it was no earthly good—a sheer waste of muscular force.

"I must try to make a man of him," Dominic answered hopelessly. I restrained the obvious retort that in this way he ran the risk of making, in the words of the immortal Mr. Mantalini, "a demnition damp, unpleasant corpse of him."

"He wants to be a locksmith!" burst out Cervoni. "To learn how to pick locks, I suppose," he added with sardonic bitterness.

"Why not let him be a locksmith?" I ventured.

"Who would teach him?" he cried. "Where could I leave him?" he asked, with a drop in his voice; and I had my first glimpse of genuine despair. "He steals, you know, alas! *Par la Madonne!* I believe he would put poison in your food and mine —the viper!"

He raised his face and both his clenched fists slowly to heaven. However, Cesar never dropped poison into our cups. One cannot be sure, but I fancy he went to work in another way.

This voyage, of which the details need not be given, we had to range far afield for sufficient reasons. Coming up from the South to end it with the important and

really dangerous part of the scheme in hand, we found it necessary to look into Barcelona for certain definite information. This appears like running one's head into the very jaws of the lion, but in reality it was not so. We had one or two high, influential friends there, and many others humble but valuable because bought for good hard cash. We were in no danger of being molested; indeed, the important information reached us promptly by the hands of a Custom-house officer, who came on board full of showy zeal to poke an iron rod into the layer of oranges which made the visible part of our cargo in the hatchway.

I forgot to mention before that the *Tremolino* was officially known as a fruit and cork-wood trader. The zealous officer managed to slip a useful piece of paper into Dominic's hand as he went ashore, and a few hours afterwards, being off duty,

he returned on board again athirst for drinks and gratitude. He got both as a matter of course. While he sat sipping his liqueur in the tiny cabin, Dominic plied him with questions as to the whereabouts of the guardacostas. The preventive service afloat was really the one for us to reckon with, and it was material for our success and safety to know the exact position of the patrol craft in the neighbourhood. The news could not have been more favourable. The officer mentioned a small place on the coast some twelve miles off, where, unsuspicious and unready, she was lying at anchor, with her sails unbent, painting yards and scraping spars. Then he left us after the usual compliments, smirking reassuringly over his shoulder.

I had kept below pretty close all day from excess of prudence. The stake played on that trip was big.

"We are ready to go at once, but for

Cesar, who has been missing ever since breakfast," announced Dominic to me in his slow, grim way.

Where the fellow had gone, and why, we could not imagine. The usual surmises in the case of a missing seaman did not apply to Cesar's absence. He was too odious for love, friendship, gambling, or even casual intercourse. But once or twice he had wandered away like this before.

Dominic went ashore to look for him, but returned at the end of two hours alone and very angry, as I could see by the token of the invisible smile under his moustache being intensified. We wondered what had become of the wretch, and made a hurried investigation amongst our portable property. He had stolen nothing.

"He will be back before long," I said confidently. Ten minutes afterwards one of the men on deck called out loudly: "I can see him coming."

Cesar had only his shirt and trousers on. He had sold his coat, apparently for pocket-money.

"You knave!" was all Dominic said, with a terrible softness of voice.

He restrained his choler for a time. "Where have you been, vagabond?" he asked menacingly.

Nothing would induce Cesar to answer that question. It was as if he even disdained to lie. He faced us, drawing back his lips and gnashing his teeth, and did not shrink an inch before the sweep of Dominic's arm. He went down as if shot, of course. But this time I noticed that, when picking himself up, he remained longer than usual on all fours, baring his big teeth over his shoulder and glaring upwards at his uncle with a new sort of hate in his round, yellow eyes. That permanent sentiment seemed pointed at that moment by especial malice and curiosity. I became

quite interested. If he ever manages to put poison in the dishes, I thought to myself, this is how he will look at us as we sit at our meal. But I did not, of course, believe for a moment that he would ever put poison in our food. He ate the same things himself. Moreover, he had no poison. And I could not imagine a human being so blinded by cupidity as to sell poison to such an atrocious creature.

We slipped out to sea quietly at dusk, and all through the night everything went well. The breeze was gusty; a southerly blow was making up. It was fair wind for our course. Now and then Dominic slowly and rhythmically struck his hands together a few times, as if applauding the performance of the *Tremolino*. The balancelle hummed and quivered as she flew along, dancing lightly under our feet.

At daybreak I pointed out to Dominic, amongst the several sail in view running

before the gathering storm, one particular vessel. The press of canvas she carried made her loom up high, end-on, like a grey column standing motionless directly in our wake.

"Look at this fellow, Dominic," I said. "He seems to be in a hurry."

The Padrone made no remark, but, wrapping his black cloak close about him, stood up to look. His weather-tanned face, framed in the hood, had an aspect of authority and challenging force, with the deep-set eyes gazing far away fixedly, without a wink, like the intent, merciless, steady eyes of a sea-bird.

"*Chi va piano va sano,*" he remarked at last, with a derisive glance over the side, in ironic allusion to our own tremendous speed.

The *Tremolino* was doing her best, and seemed to hardly touch the great bursts of foam over which she darted. I crouched

down again to get some shelter from the low bulwark. After more than half an hour of swaying immobility expressing a concentrated, breathless watchfulness, Dominic sank on the deck by my side. Within the monkish cowl his eyes gleamed with a fierce expression which surprised me. All he said was:

"He has come out here to wash the new paint off his yards, I suppose."

"What?" I shouted, getting up on my knees. "Is she the guardacosta?"

The perpetual suggestion of a smile under Dominic's piratical moustaches seemed to become more accentuated—quite real, grim, actually almost visible through the wet and uncurled hair. Judging by that symptom, he must have been in a towering rage. But I could also see that he was puzzled, and that discovery affected me disagreeably. Dominic puzzled! For a long time, leaning against the bulwark,

I gazed over the stern at the grey column that seemed to stand swaying slightly in our wake always at the same distance.

Meanwhile Dominic, black and cowled, sat cross-legged on the deck, with his back to the wind, recalling vaguely an Arab chief in his *bournuss* sitting on the sand. Above his motionless figure the little cord and tassel on the stiff point of the hood swung about inanely in the gale. At last I gave up facing the wind and rain, and crouched down by his side. I was satisfied that the sail was a patrol craft. Her presence was not a thing to talk about, but soon, between two clouds charged with hail-showers, a gleam of sunshine fell upon her sails, and our men discovered her character for themselves. From that moment I noticed that they seemed to take no heed of each other or of anything else. They could spare no eyes and no thought but for the slight column-shape astern of

us. Its swaying had become perceptible. For a moment she remained dazzlingly white, then faded away slowly to nothing in a squall, only to reappear again, nearly black, resembling a post stuck upright against the slaty background of solid cloud. Since first noticed she had not gained on us a foot.

"She will never catch the *Tremolino,*" I said exultingly.

Dominic did not look at me. He remarked absently, but justly, that the heavy weather was in our pursuer's favour. She was three times our size. What we had to do was to keep our distance till dark, which we could manage easily, and then haul off to seaward and consider the situation. But his thoughts seemed to stumble in the darkness of some not-solved enigma, and soon he fell silent. We ran steadily, wing-and-wing. Cape San Sebastian nearly ahead seemed to recede from us in the

squalls of rain, and come out again to meet our rush, every time more distinct between the showers.

For my part I was by no means certain that this *gabelou* (as our men alluded to her opprobriously) was after us at all. There were nautical difficulties in such a view which made me express the sanguine opinion that she was in all innocence simply changing her station. At this Dominic condescended to turn his head.

"I tell you she is in chase," he affirmed moodily, after one short glance astern.

I never doubted his opinion. But with all the ardour of a neophyte and the pride of an apt learner I was at that time a great nautical casuist.

"What I can't understand," I insisted subtly, "is how on earth, with this wind, she has managed to be just where she was when we first made her out. It is clear that she could not, and did not, gain twelve

miles on us during the night. And there are other impossibilities. . . ."

Dominic had been sitting motionless, like an inanimate black cone posed on the stern deck, near the rudder-head, with a small tassel fluttering on its sharp point, and for a time he preserved the immobility of his meditation. Then, bending over with a short laugh, he gave my ear the bitter fruit of it. He understood everything now perfectly. She was where we had seen her first, not because she had caught us up, but because we had passed her during the night while she was already waiting for us, hove-to, most likely, on our very track.

"Do you understand——already?" Dominic muttered in a fierce undertone. "Already! You know we left a good eight hours before we were expected to leave, otherwise she would have been in time to lie in wait for us on the other side of the Cape, and"—he snapped his teeth like a

wolf close to my face—"and she would have had us like—that."

I saw it all plainly enough now. They had eyes in their heads and all their wits about them in that craft. We had passed them in the dark as they jogged on easily towards their ambush with the idea that we were yet far behind. At daylight, however, sighting a balancelle ahead under a press of canvas, they had made sail in chase. But if that was so, then——

Dominic seized my arm.

"Yes, yes! She came out on an information—do you see it?—on information. . . . We have been sold—betrayed. Why? How? What for? We always paid them all so well on shore. . . . No! But it is my head that is going to burst." He seemed to choke, tugged at the throat button of the cloak, jumped up open-mouthed as if to hurl curses and denunciation, but instantly mastered himself, and, wrapping

up the cloak closer about him, sat down on the deck again as quiet as ever.

"Yes, it must be the work of some scoundrel ashore," I observed.

He pulled the edge of the hood well forward over his brow before he muttered:

"A scoundrel . . . Yes . . . It's evident."

"Well," I said, "they can't get us, that's clear."

"No," he assented quietly, "they cannot."

We shaved the Cape very close to avoid an adverse current. On the other side, by the effect of the land, the wind failed us so completely for a moment that the *Tremolino's* two great lofty sails hung idle to the masts in the thundering uproar of the seas breaking upon the shore we had left behind. And when the returning gust filled them again, we saw with amazement half of the new mainsail, which we thought fit to drive the boat under before giving way,

absolutely fly out of the bolt-ropes. We lowered the yard at once, and saved it all, but it was no longer a sail; it was only a heap of soaked strips of canvas cumbering the deck and weighting the craft. Dominic gave the order to throw the whole lot overboard.

"I would have had the yard thrown overboard too," he said, leading me aft again, "if it had not been for the trouble. Let no sign escape you," he continued, lowering his voice, "but I am going to tell you something terrible. Listen: I have observed that the roping stitches on that sail have been cut! You hear? Cut with a knife in many places. And yet it stood all that time. Not enough cut. That flap did it at last. What matters it? But look! there's treachery seated on this very deck. By the horns of the devil! seated here at our very backs. Do not turn, signorino."

We were facing aft then.

"What's to be done?" I asked, appalled.

"Nothing. Silence! Be a man, signorino."

"What else?" I said.

To show I could be a man, I resolved to utter no sound as long as Dominic himself had the force to keep his lips closed. Nothing but silence becomes certain situations. Moreover, the experience of treachery seemed to spread a hopeless drowsiness over my thoughts and senses. For an hour or more we watched our pursuer surging out nearer and nearer from amongst the squalls that sometimes hid her altogether. But even when not seen, we felt her there like a knife at our throats. She gained on us frightfully. And the *Tremolino*, in a fierce breeze and in much smoother water, swung on easily under her one sail, with something appallingly careless in the joyous freedom of her motion. Another half-

hour went by. I could not stand it any longer.

"They will get the poor barky," I stammered out suddenly, almost on the verge of tears.

Dominic stirred no more than a carving. A sense of catastrophic loneliness overcame my inexperienced soul. The vision of my companions passed before me. The whole Royalist gang was in Monte Carlo now, I reckoned. And they appeared to me clear-cut and very small, with affected voices and stiff gestures, like a procession of rigid marionettes upon a toy stage. I gave a start. What was this? A mysterious, remorseless whisper came from within the motionless black hood at my side.

"*Il faut la tuer.*"

I heard it very well.

"What do you say, Dominic?" I asked, moving nothing but my lips.

And the whisper within the hood re-

peated mysteriously, "She must be killed."

My heart began to beat violently.

"That's it," I faltered out. "But how?"

"You love her well?"

"I do."

"Then you must find the heart for that work too. You must steer her yourself, and I shall see to it that she dies quickly, without leaving as much as a chip behind."

"Can you?" I murmured, fascinated by the black hood turned immovably over the stern, as if in unlawful communion with that old sea of musicians, exiles, slave-dealers, and warriors, the sea of legends and terrors, where the mariners of remote antiquity used to hear the restless shade of an old wanderer weep aloud in the dark.

"I know a rock," whispered the initiated voice within the hood secretly. "But —caution! It must be done before our men perceive what we are about. Whom can

we trust now? A knife drawn across the fore halyards would bring the foresail down, and put an end to our liberty in twenty minutes. And the best of our men may be afraid of drowning. There is our little boat, but in an affair like this no one can be sure of being saved."

The voice ceased. We had started from Barcelona with our dinghy in tow; afterwards it was too risky to try to get her in, so we let her take her chance of the seas at the end of a comfortable scope of rope. Many times she had seemed to us completely overwhelmed, but soon we would see her bob up again on a wave, apparently as buoyant and whole as ever.

"I understand," I said softly. "Very well, Dominic. When?"

"Not yet. We must get a little more in first," answered the voice from the hood in a ghostly murmur.

It was settled. I had now the courage

to turn about. Our men crouched about the decks here and there with anxious, crestfallen faces, all turned one way to watch the chaser. For the first time that morning I perceived Cesar stretched out full length on the deck near the foremast and wondered where he had been skulking till then. But he might in truth have been at my elbow all the time for all I knew. We had been too absorbed in watching our fate to pay attention to each other. Nobody had eaten anything that morning, but the men had been coming constantly to drink at the water-butt.

I ran down to the cabin. I had there, put away in a locker, ten thousand francs in gold of whose presence on board, so far as I was aware, not a soul except Dominic had the slightest inkling. When I emerged on deck again Dominic had turned about and was peering from under his cowl at the coast. Cape Creux closed the view

ahead. To the left a wide bay, its waters torn and swept by fierce squalls, seemed full of smoke. Astern the sky had a menacing look.

Directly he saw me, Dominic, in a placid tone, wanted to know what was the matter. I came close to him and, looking as unconcerned as I could, told him in an undertone that I had found the locker broken open and the money-belt gone. Last evening it was still there.

"What did you want to do with it?" he asked me, trembling violently.

"Put it round my waist, of course," I answered, amazed to hear his teeth chattering.

"Cursed gold!" he muttered. "The weight of the money might have cost you your life, perhaps." He shuddered. "There is no time to talk about that now."

"I am ready."

"Not yet. I am waiting for that squall

to come over," he muttered. And a few leaden minutes passed.

The squall came over at last. Our pursuer, overtaken by a sort of murky whirlwind, disappeared from our sight. The *Tremolino* quivered and bounded forward. The land ahead vanished, too, and we seemed to be left alone in a world of water and wind.

"*Prenez la barre, monsieur,*" Dominic broke the silence suddenly in an austere voice. "Take hold of the tiller." He bent his hood to my ear. "The balancelle is yours. Your own hands must deal the blow. I—I have yet another piece of work to do." He spoke up loudly to the man who steered. "Let the signorino take the tiller, and you with the others stand by to haul the boat alongside quickly at the word."

The man obeyed, surprised, but silent. The others stirred, and pricked up their

ears at this. I heard their murmurs. "What now? Are we going to run in somewhere and take to our heels? The Padrone knows what he is doing."

Dominic went forward. He paused to look down at Cesar, who, as I have said before, was lying full length face down by the foremast, then stepped over him, and dived out of my sight under the foresail. I saw nothing ahead. It was impossible for me to see anything except the foresail open and still, like a great shadowy wing. But Dominic had his bearings. His voice came to me from forward, in a just audible cry:

"Now, signorino!"

I bore on the tiller, as instructed before. Again I heard him faintly, and then I had only to hold her straight. No ship ran so joyously to her death before. She rose and fell, as if floating in space, and darted forward, whizzing like an arrow. Dominic, stooping under the foot of the

foresail, reappeared, and stood steadying himself against the mast, with a raised forefinger in an attitude of expectant attention. A second before the shock his arm fell down by his side. At that I set my teeth. And then——

Talk of splintered planks and smashed timbers! This shipwreck lies upon my soul with the dread and horror of a homicide, with the unforgettable remorse of having crushed a living, faithful heart at a single blow. At one moment the rush and the soaring swing of speed; the next a crash, and death, stillness—a moment of horrible immobility, with the song of the wind changed to a strident wail, and the heavy waters boiling up menacing and sluggish around the corpse. I saw in a distracting minute the foreyard fly fore and aft with a brutal swing, the men all in a heap, cursing with fear, and hauling frantically at the line of the boat. With a strange wel-

coming of the familiar I saw also Cesar amongst them, and recognized Dominic's old, well-known, effective gesture, the horizontal sweep of his powerful arm. I recollect distinctly saying to myself, "Cesar must go down, of course," and then, as I was scrambling on all fours, the swinging tiller I had let go caught me a crack under the ear, and knocked me over senseless.

I don't think I was actually unconscious for more than a few minutes, but when I came to myself the dinghy was driving before the wind into a sheltered cove, two men just keeping her straight with their oars. Dominic, with his arm round my shoulders, supported me in the stern sheets.

We landed in a familiar part of the country. Dominic took one of the boat's oars with him. I suppose he was thinking of the stream we would have presently to cross, on which there was a miserable

specimen of a punt, often robbed of its pole. But first of all we had to ascend the ridge of land at the back of the Cape. He helped me up. I was dizzy. My head felt very large and heavy. At the top of the ascent I clung to him, and we stopped to rest.

To the right, below us, the wide, smoky bay was empty. Dominic had kept his word. There was not a chip to be seen around the black rock from which the *Tremolino*, with her plucky heart crushed at one blow, had slipped off into deep water to her eternal rest. The vastness of the open sea was smothered in driving mists, and in the centre of the thinning squall, phantom-like, under a frightful press of canvas, the unconscious guarda-costa dashed on, still chasing to the north-ward. Our men were already descending the reverse slope to look for that punt which we knew from experience was not

always to be found easily. I looked after them with dazed, misty eyes. One, two, three, four.

"Dominic, where's Cesar?" I cried.

As if repulsing the very sound of the name, the Padrone made that ample, sweeping, knocking-down gesture. I stepped back a pace and stared at him fearfully. His open shirt uncovered his muscular neck and the thick hair on his chest. He planted the oar upright in the soft soil, and rolling up slowly his right sleeve, extended the bare arm before my face.

"This," he began, with an extreme deliberation, whose superhuman restraint vibrated with the suppressed violence of his feelings, "is the arm which delivered the blow. I am afraid it is your own gold that did the rest. I forgot all about your money." He clasped his hands together in sudden distress. "I forgot, I forgot," he repeated disconsolately.

"Cesar stole the belt?" I stammered out, bewildered.

"And who else? *Canallia!* He must have been spying on you for days. And he did the whole thing. Absent all day in Barcelona. *Traditore!* Sold his jacket—to hire a horse. Ha! ha! A good affair! I tell you it was he who set him at us. . . ."

Dominic pointed at the sea, where the guardacosta was a mere dark speck. His chin dropped on his breast.

". . . On information," he murmured, in a gloomy voice. "A Cervoni! Oh! my poor brother! . . ."

"And you drowned him," I said feebly.

"I struck once, and the wretch went down like a stone—with the gold. Yes. But he had time to read in my eyes that nothing could save him while I was alive. And had I not the right—I, Dominic Cervoni, Padrone, who brought him aboard your fellucca—my nephew, a traitor?"

He pulled the oar out of the ground and helped me carefully down the slope. All the time he never once looked me in the face. He punted us over, then shouldered the oar again and waited till our men were at some distance before he offered me his arm. After we had gone a little way, the fishing hamlet we were making for came into view. Dominic stopped.

"Do you think you can make your way as far as the houses by yourself?" he asked me quietly.

"Yes, I think so. But why? Where are you going, Dominic?"

"Anywhere. What a question—Signorino, you are but little more than a boy to ask such a question of a man having this tale in his family. Ah! *Traditore!* What made me ever own that spawn of a hungry devil for our own blood! Thief, cheat, coward, liar—other men can deal with that. But I was his uncle, and so . . . I wish

he had poisoned me—*charogne!* But this: that I, a confidential man and a Corsican, should have to ask your pardon for bringing on board your vessel, of which I was Padrone, a Cervoni, who has betrayed you —a traitor!—that is too much. It is too much. Well, I beg your pardon; and you may spit in Dominic's face because a traitor of our blood taints us all. A theft may be made good between men, a lie may be set right, a death avenged, but what can one do to atone for a treachery like this? . . . Nothing."

He turned and walked away from me along the bank of the stream, flourishing a vengeful arm and repeating to himself slowly, with savage emphasis: "Ah! *Canaille! Canaille! Canaille!* . . ." He left me there trembling with weakness and mute with awe. Unable to make a sound, I gazed after the strangely desolate figure of that seaman carrying an oar on his shoulder up

a barren, rock-strewn ravine under the dreary leaden sky of *Tremolino's* last day. Thus, walking deliberately, with his back to the sea, Dominic vanished from my sight.

With the quality of our desires, thoughts, and wonder proportioned to our infinite littleness, we measure even time itself by our own stature. Imprisoned in the house of personal illusions, thirty centuries in mankind's history seem less to look back upon than thirty years of our own life. And Dominic Cervoni takes his place in my memory by the side of the legendary wanderer on the sea of marvels and terrors, by the side of the fatal and impious adventurer, to whom the evoked shade of the soothsayer predicted a journey inland with an oar on his shoulder, till he met men who had never set eyes on ships and oars. It seems to me I can see them side by side in the twilight of an arid

land, the unfortunate possessors of the secret lore of the sea, bearing the emblem of their hard calling on their shoulders, surrounded by silent and curious men; even as I, too, having turned my back upon the sea, am bearing those few pages in the twilight, with the hope of finding in an inland valley the silent welcome of some patient listener.

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